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Church Extension in Aberdare

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A LETTER

TO THE

LANDOWNERS, IRONMASTERS, COLLIERY  
PROPRIETORS, AND OTHER WEALTHY CHURCHMEN,  
INTERESTED IN THE PARISH.

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ABERDARE:

PRINTED BY WM. MORRIS, POST OFFICE & No. 3, HIGH-STREET.

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THE VICARAGE, ABERDARE,

April 24th, 1867.

GENTLEMEN,

Several months have now elapsed since the date of my appointment to the spiritual charge of the parish of Aberdare. That charge has been committed to me by the authority of that National Church whose mission to the people of this land dates from the earliest age. I venture to remind you that my calling brings me into grave relations of duty towards those to whom these words are addressed. To me the National Church has committed the chief place in the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments in the parish of Aberdare.

To you in the same parish Providence has committed the ministry of wealth and those powerful and manifold influences by which wealth is accompanied. With all humility, therefore, I would remind you that between the duties of our respective spheres there exists a relation which cannot be ignored.

I hardly need state that in those districts in which wealth is being created the population by an inseparable consequence rapidly increases. It is essential to the highest welfare of society that the influence of the Church should advance in parallel progress with the growth of the population. How can this end be assured? Not without a due realisation of their responsibilities on the part of those to whom God has

committed the ministry of wealth. The social and religious law which imposes the unalterable obligation of augmenting the resources of the Church's material organization in proportion to the increase of personal possessions was revealed to an early representative of the "mighty men of wealth," by the voice of the Eternal Spirit which dictated that solemn consecration, Genesis, xxviii., 22, "Of all that Thou shall give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

I would now invite you to consider how far this dedication of its due proportion to Divine purposes has accompanied that enormous increase of material resources which God has given to the parish of Aberdare. To this end I must be permitted to call your attention to the present state of the Church in the parish.

The population, within the existing boundaries, is variously estimated at numbers not less than 30,000 souls. Of this number 12,000 are living in the town of Aberdare, and are within easy reach of the churches of St. Elvan and St. Mary. About 3,000 inhabit the village of Hirwain, in which a small church containing 250 sittings was erected several years ago. The remaining 17,000 or 20,000 live in the scattered villages of Cwmdare, Llwydcoed, Aberaman, Cwmbach, Cwmaman, and Cap Coch. Of these villages the largest, viz., Aberaman, contains more than 8,000 ; the smallest, Cap Coch, not fewer than 800 souls. But these figures, although large, do not by any means suggest the full extent of the ministerial labours required in the parish. It may be asserted, without fear of exaggeration, that those labours are nearly doubled by the general prevalence of the two languages, and the consequently necessary multiplication of Church

Services. It is, therefore, evident that, under these conditions, the work of the Church cannot be strongly and efficiently advanced, unless the number of labouring clergy be such as to bear an adequate proportion to the number of the population, and the special difficulties of the sphere. These statements, I conceive, suffice to prove that it is a work of no ordinary difficulty to extend the ministrations of the Church to large groups of population separated by considerable distances. The organization capable of providing these ministrations must be extensive, and cannot be effectually maintained without a large expenditure. But a glance at the resources of the parish will, I venture to believe, suggest a feeling of surprise that the means of that expenditure have not been more adequately provided. It is true that the endowments of the Church in the parish, although sufficient for the population for which they were originally intended, are utterly inadequate to provide for a population multiplied twenty-fold. But the rateable value of the present parish (exclusively of the recently formed parish of Mountain Ash), is not less than £137,000. The annual incomes arising from the several properties of the parish are in proportion to these figures. Of these vast resources a very large proportion is at the command of those who "profess and call themselves" members of that National Church, as a minister of which I address you.

How much then has been done in the past for the support and extension of her organization by those members of the Church to whom her Master has committed the stewardship of these resources? In deference to the well-known feelings of the majority of the parishioners no attempt to assess a church

rate has been made for several years. At the time when that assessment lapsed the owners and occupiers of property very generally signified their readiness to contribute the annual sum required in the more popular form of a voluntary rate. That promise has not been justified by the performance. The voluntary rate has been collected with difficulty, and has produced but the utterly inadequate sum of £60 per annum. It is almost unnecessary to remark that a rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per £1, levied upon the properties of those who are professedly members of the National Church, would produce far more fruitful results than this appeal to voluntary liberality. That the offerings of churchmen, who derive from the parish large revenues, should be upon so insufficient a scale argues but an imperfect sense of the responsibilities of their relation to the Church. That professed members of the Church should take advantage of the unsettled state of the church-rate question, to withhold from her Sanctuary the tribute which is from them morally due, is an evidence of disloyalty to her communion which inflicts upon the Church injuries far deeper and more deadly than the loss of mere material resources. The moral and spiritual losses inflicted upon the Church by the neglect of her professed sons cannot be rated. The position of a wealthy churchman who withholds from the Church her dues is not neutral. He not only neglects to gather for her but he actually scatters. In the presence of wealthy members who can, but do not, support the Church, the sympathies of the poor cannot be equally aroused in her behalf. The poorer members cannot occupy that moral ground of duty which is allotted to the rich. It should never be forgotten that to profess adherence to the Church, while with-

holding from her every tribute of duty, is but to betray her with a kiss.

In the parish of Aberdare the cold indifference of her sons has well nigh "broken down her altars." The Old Parish Church, hallowed by the most sacred memories of generations, has been suffered to fall into so ruinous a state of decay that Divine Service cannot be celebrated within its walls until its restoration shall have been effected.\* It is true that the Churches of St. Elvan and St. Mary, in the town of Aberdare, and the Chapel of Ease, at Hirwain, have been built within the last twenty years. But the fabrics of these churches do not seem destined to be enduring monuments of the Christian self-devotion of those churchmen who reap so large a proportion of the enormous wealth of the parish of Aberdare.

For their erection the money was raised not without the utmost difficulty. In each case the Building Committee found it necessary to reduce their outlay to the lowest possible figure. In consequence of the inadequate contributions to their building-funds St. Elvan's Church and the Hirwain Chapel of Ease were built in so cheap and slight a manner that the former is already seriously dilapidated, and the latter, although it has not stood more than ten years, cannot be saved from ruin but by immediate restoration.

\* The statements of this letter refer exclusively to the state of the Church within the present limits of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Aberdare. The recent formation of Mountain Ash, and of St. Fagan's, Mill-street, into separate Ecclesiastical Districts, debars the writer from the pleasure of dwelling upon the fact that in the former, Church, Schools, and Parsonage, have been erected by J. Bruce Pryce, Esq., and in the latter by the Baroness Windsor.

The cost of St. Mary's Church, more recently built, has not yet been completely defrayed.\* A debt of £250, the interest of which is paid by the contributions of working-men, who form its numerous congregation, still remains as a proof of the indifference of the owners and leaseholders of the mineral wealth of Aberdare to the religious welfare of the thousands employed in multiplying their riches. Where God has most bountifully given material wealth there man has dedicated to His Name the meanest and most perishable buildings.

In the populous villages of Cwmdare, Llwydcoed, Aberaman, Cwmbach, Cwmaman, and Cap Coch, no consecrated places of worship have been provided by the Church. At Aberaman, Cwmbach, and Cwmaman, church services are celebrated under most depressing difficulties in buildings grievously unworthy. For several years the village of Aberaman containing a population of 8,000 souls has been destitute of the advantages of church or school. The chief estate in the district has recently been purchased by Messrs. Elliot, Potter, and Co., and there is every reason to hope that the grievous neglect of the past will in some degree be remedied by the immediate erection of adequate school buildings. I may here add that the buildings of the Aberdare National School are in such a state as urgently to require restoration and enlargement at an estimated outlay of £800.

\* The late Incumbent is furthermore personally liable for a debt of more than £300 still due to the contractor for the erection of St. Mary's Church. There are also several other lesser liabilities. In short, the present Incumbent, in entering upon the duties of his charge, finds the organization of the Church, in the Parish of Aberdare, encumbered by liabilities forming a total not less than £800.

I have hitherto dwelt upon the extent of the sacrifices made by the owners of property, who are members of the Church, to provide Church buildings. I will now ask what has been done to provide the living agency of an ordained and educated ministry? The number of clergy now labouring in the parish is six. If this number were doubled it would hardly suffice to afford the ministrations urgently needed. At present the five curates are maintained by grants from the Llandaff Church Extension Society, the Additional Curate, and the Church Pastoral Aid Societies, supplemented by annual grants from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The church men among whose workmen they labour, contribute nothing to the support of these ministers of their Church.\*

But it is often urged that religious ministrations have been provided by Nonconformist Denominations.

I am now addressing those only who "profess and call themselves" members of the National Church. It is therefore unnecessary that I should endeavour to demonstrate *to them* the supreme authority of that Church's mission, order, and teaching, and the consequent "necessity laid upon" her members to extend to the utmost the spiritual life that flows within the channels of her Communion. While recalling the self-evident truth that the responsibilities of Churchmen towards the Church, cannot in any degree be affected by the external operations of independent religious

\* The above statement refers only to the payment of the five Stipendiary Curates. Several years ago the Marquis of Bute, the patron of the living, permanently increased the income of the Incumbent by an additional endowment of £75 per annum. It should also be added that R. Fothergill, Esq., and Co., have, for several years, granted to the Incumbent, at a nominal rent, the use of a field of 5½ acres, thereby virtually augmenting the Benefice by the value of £25 per annum.



societies, I must, nevertheless, be permitted to remind you of the undeniable fact that the ministrations so provided do not owe their main support to the offerings of the wealthy.

It is true that a large number of chapels have been built in the various districts of the parish. But it cannot be asserted that the ministrations which they afford are provided by the self-denial of the owners of wealth.—The highest religious welfare of the Nonconforming Societies, no less than that of the Church, has suffered from the indifference of the wealthy. The Nonconformist Meeting Houses would not otherwise have been so generally burdened by debt. And the Nonconformists would not have been compelled to have recourse so often to many undignified and some absolutely illegal sources of revenue.

The state of the Church, and the struggles of Nonconformist Societies alike, prove the owners of wealth to have been hitherto indifferent to the claims of the Sanctuary upon those resources which God has committed to them. Can it excite any surprise that the consequences of this neglect are visible in the state of the parish? Surely the real subject of surprise is that in the apathy of their natural social leaders, the working-men have done so much to supply their deficiencies. At the same time it cannot be doubted that a Christian ministry, independent of the gifts of those who receive its ministrations, is necessary to the highest welfare of society.

I would now state the means by which it is proposed in some degree to remedy these painful short comings. It is intended to establish a parochial association to be termed  
"The Aberdare Church Extension Association."

The first object of this Association will be to provide the annual revenue necessary for the maintenance of a body of clergy adequate to the wants of the population. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are prepared to make a considerable number of annual grants of £60, on the condition that equivalent sums be provided from local sources. To provide these sums will be the first object of the Association, which it is proposed to establish. It is hoped by these means to secure for the parish the services of men sufficiently able and experienced to deal successfully with the ministerial difficulties of so populous a sphere. By this organization, if duly supported by those upon whose liberability it has undeniable claims, the number of clergy can be from time to time increased in proportion to the increase of the population.

The second object of the Association will be the formation of a permanent fund for the promotion of Church building in the parish. There are at this time no less than four populous villages in which Churches are urgently needed. It is confidently hoped that the constant operation of the proposed Association, will, ere long, result in the accomplishment of the work.

It has always been found extremely difficult to build Churches and to provide Church-ministrations so as to meet the wants of new villages. It often happens that the opening of a new colliery suddenly aggregates a considerable population in a district which was previously almost uninhabited. Hitherto the Church has failed to occupy these spheres of usefulness until the opportunity for the extension of her influence has been well nigh lost. The "Aberdare Church Extension Association" will meet this difficulty by

providing from time to time the means of church extension. It is hoped that the Church will be enabled to seize those opportunities of influence which she now forfeits altogether, or only seizes by spasmodic efforts too often delayed until they have become ineffectual.

It is my duty most urgently to invite the owners of the wealth of the parish to consider their responsibilities. I appeal to them to support this Association.

The Committee of Management will be so constituted as to afford its supporters full assurance of the judicious expenditure of the money that may be contributed.

I most earnestly ask those whom I am now addressing to take a worthy view of their opportunities. I would remind them of their high privileges. To few is there given a more God-like sphere of influence than to the wealthy employer of thousands. He can wield his influence well and wisely to create around him a social Eden of intelligence, contentment, and christian virtue. He can also indulge the promptings of selfishness, to create around him a moral wilderness of ignorance and debasement.

The glorious opportunity has too often been neglected, and the claims of the Church of God have been coldly ignored. Earnestly, praying that this appeal may not be made in vain,

I have the honour to be,

Your obedient servant,

**HENRY T. EDWARDS.**

*P.S.—I beg to add that, in the course of a few weeks, a public meeting, of which due notice will be given, will be held in the town of Aberdare, for the purpose of calling more general attention to the objects, and of definitely maturing the formation of the proposed "Aberdare Church-Extension Association."*

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